

Telephone interview Salem Azzam/BBC World Service (French) 9 January 1991, concerning the Islamic conference convened by Iraq today in Baghdad:

Question: How would a Muslim explain the convening of the Islamic conference by Saddam Hussain, given his leadership of the Baath Party?

Salem Azzam: I think this conference has been organised to show the support for Iraq of the Muslim people, and to condemn the mobilisation of foreign forces, especially American, in the Gulf. The majority of Muslims do not believe President Bush when he says that these forces are there to defend Saudi Arabia and free Kuwait. They believe that the forces have come to control the most important resource of the Muslim Ummah - oil - and to maintain Israel as the strongest power in the region. One can say that they consider this a conquest of part of their territory.

Q: How important are the people attending this conference?

SA: I know that invitations have been sent to representatives of Muslim movements and organisations throughout the world, and I believe that many of them have accepted to go.

Entrevue Salem Azzam/BBC Service français le 9 janvier 1991, à l'occasion de la conférence islamique convoquée par l'Iraq à Bagdad:

Question: Comment va expliquer un Musulman l'organisation de cette conférence par le Président Saddam Hussain, comprenant sa direction du parti Baath?

Salem Azzam: Je pense que cette conférence a été organisée pour manifester l'appui du peuple musulman vers le peuple iraquien, et de condamner la mobilisation des forces étrangères, surtout l'américaine, au Golfe. La majorité des Musulmans ne croit pas le Président Bush quand il dit que ces forces sont pour défendre l'Arabie Saoudite et libérer le Koweït. Ils pensent que ces forces sont venues pour contrôler la plus importante richesse de l'Ummah islamique, c'est à dire le pétrole, et pour garder l'Israel comme la plus puissante force dans la région. On peut dire que les Musulmans considerent que c'est une conquête d'une partie de leur territoire.

Q: Comment important sont les gens que assistent à cette conférence?

SA: Je sais que des invitations ont été envoyées aux représentants des mouvements et organisations musulmans dans tout le monde, et je pense que beaucoup d'entre eux a accepté.

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Points read by telephone to Richard Donkin of the Financial Times:

- The Islamic Council has from the beginning of the crisis called for a peaceful, negotiated settlement.
- The American forces and others claim their actions were for the defence of Saudi Arabia, but there was never any real threat to Saudi Arabia from Iraq.
- Now Operation Desert Shield has changed into Operation Desert Storm, and is offensive. In the first few hours of hostilities 18,000 tons of bombs were used against targets in Iraq, the largest bombardment yet in history and greater than those against Hiroshima and Dresden.
- We believe that the Allied offensive now intends to destroy the Iraqi government and all its armaments, but no thought has been given to the eventual consequences of this, for example, how the entire Muslim world will feel about and react to the destruction of a fellow Muslim country.
- = We believe that a negotiated settlement is still possible. We call for an immediate ceasefire, to stop the bloodshed, and to prevent the widening of the conflict and the possible use of chemical and biological, and even nuclear, weapons which would bring unprecedented suffering to thousands of innocent civilians.

Salem Azzam, Secretary General of the Islamic Council

Michael Prescott

Observer

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